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SUBJECT: GEORGIA: DASD WALLANDER MEETING WITH MINDEF
AKHALAIA

Classified By: Ambassador John R. Bass for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Celeste Wallander laid out the results of the Bilateral Defense Consultations (BDC), reaffirming U.S. support for Georgia's defense reform and modernization along Euro-Atlantic lines in her meeting with Georgian Minister of Defense Bacho Akhalaia on the margins of the BDC in Tbilisi. Wallander asserted that assistance is a long-term process and a long-term commitment by the United States, which is contingent on Georgia's reform progress and ability to meet key milestones. Minister of Defense Akhalaia appreciated the strong U.S. footprint at the 2009 BDC and reiterated Georgia's need for continued U.S. assistance as it goes through a wholesale reformation of its defense institutions. Akhalaia laid out the short and long-term challenges faced by the Ministry of Defense, which included the need for increased resources focused on the General Defense Plan, developing doctrine, and curriculum development for the National Academy. End Summary.

DEFENSE PRIORITIES

¶2. (C) Minister Akhalaia provided an in-progress update of developments in Georgia's defense reform process. Noting the BDC provided the U.S. an opportunity to gauge Georgia's current focus and priorities, Akhalaia focused on the equal and interrelated problems in training, education and weapons procurement. As the MoD is currently focused on educating and training its officer corps, military personnel and civilians, Akhalaia had decided to elevate the priority of education by apportioning additional national funds into establishing a National Military Academy (NMA). At the current stage, the NMA needed serious attention and assistance, and U.S. support will be vital to ensure the institution can serve Georgia's vital needs. Akhalaia admitted that Georgia has neither the intellectual nor financial resources to fully solve the educational capability gaps that exist. Despite these shortcomings, the MoD will focus an increasing amount of its resources and energy into supporting an intellectual framework for the GAF. Akhalaia asserted that without resolving the problem of education, it will be difficult to resolve the entire range of MoD problems. Akhalaia concluded by noting that Georgia would appreciate increased assistance on developing its doctrine and defense plan.

U.S. SUPPORT

¶3. (C) DASD Wallander praised Georgia's progress since the 2008 BDC. Focusing on strategic documents had proven fruitful, as the ongoing National Security Review process

will set the foundation for lasting security sector reforms. DASD Wallander underscored the array of U.S. assistance efforts since the 2008 BDC, noting how the U.S. had reoriented its focus and placed significant resources into supporting a "brains before brawn" approach which will lay the groundwork for Georgia's defense needs, reform process and NATO aspirations. As the U.S. and Georgia continued to review areas of cooperation, it is vital that Georgia prioritize its assistance needs. Georgia needs to ensure its budget process creates a transparent acquisition and planning system that best serves Georgia's multi-faceted needs. Qsystem that best serves Georgia's multi-faceted needs. Akhalaia agreed, noting specifically that Georgia is making moves to reform its acquisition system and had a unified budget plan for 2010 that recognized the government's limited resources and updated priorities. Akhalaia described his efforts to decentralize administrative decision-making in the MoD to ensure an efficient reform process.

PARTNERSHIP LINKED TO REFORMS

14. (C) DASD Wallander described how the U.S.-Georgia defense partnership developed in the context of the larger bilateral relationship. Development in the U.S.-Georgia defense partnership is intrinsically linked to security and political developments in Georgia, as the focus, intensity and ability to cooperate depended on Georgia's restraint, reform progress and the political decisions Georgia makes. Georgia is under a microscope in Washington, and it is vital that Georgia deepens its commitment to democratic development, which can thereby enable a stronger defense cooperation relationship. Akhalaia reiterated that Georgia

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has a chance of success only within the limits of democracy. There was no alternative source of development for Georgia, and Akhalaia reaffirmed that he would continue to support the government's efforts aimed at strengthening democracy.

GEORGIA DEPLOYMENT PROGRAM-INTERNATIONAL SECURITY ASSISTANCE FORCE (ISAF), AFGHANISTAN

15. (C) DASD Wallander turned to the Afghanistan deployment, describing her visit to the Krtsanisi Training Facility. Wallander reported that the training was going extremely well and U.S. Marine trainers were pleased with Georgia's progress. DASD Wallander noted that it was a privilege to visit the training, as witnessing Georgia's personnel standing side-by-side with U.S. forces only reinforced the significance of Georgia's offer and efforts to support ISAF. The U.S. will continue to ensure that Georgia is trained and equipped for its efforts in Afghanistan. Akhalaia thanked the U.S. for its continuing assistance and support for preparing Georgia's personnel. He further stated it was essential that Georgian forces joining their ISAF counterparts be prepared for the difficult challenges that awaited them, and Akhalaia appreciated U.S. efforts to train and equip Georgia's forces. Akhalaia said Georgia is prepared to stand by the U.S. no matter what decision was taken in Afghanistan regarding U.S. presence.

STATE PARTNERSHIP

16. (U) Georgia National Guard Adjutant General Nesbitt described the 15-year U.S.-Georgia state partnership, which had successfully provided a mechanism for strong bilateral cooperation. General Nesbitt remarked that over the past fifteen years he had personally watched Georgia develop at a remarkable pace. Viewed in perspective, Georgia's progress gave the U.S. confidence that it would succeed and build a strong democratic state along Euro-Atlantic lines. The Georgia National Guard will continue to work closely with the Georgian Armed Forces, and the new Chief of Georgia's National Guard has a solid vision and reform plan. The State of Georgia will engage wherever it can in support and looks forward to hosting the 2010 Bilateral Defense Consultations.

17. (U) Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Celeste Wallander has cleared this cable.
BASS